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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (5/27): The Peace Process - a Process, but no Peace?

Main Stories:

Reports about a "comprehensive prisoner swap" between Hezbollah and Israel dominated coverage in all dailies. The dailies highlighted that the expected truce will include "large numbers" of Lebanese and Palestinians in Israeli jails. According to coverage in all dailies, the exchange is "coming soon." Related reports on a truce between Hamas and Israel also generated front page coverage in all dailies. According to reports, "Amos Gilad, a senior aide to Defense Minister Ehud Barak, is due to return to Cairo next week for talks in an attempt to reach calm in the Gaza Strip." Al-Quds quoted an Israeli official saying, "it is too early to talk about the failure of a truce." All dailies highlighted that Egypt is "exerting efforts to achieve calm."

The dailies highlighted comments made by Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad during a session for the Council of Ministers in Ramallah on May 26. All dailies quoted Fayyad "praising" the success of the Bethlehem Investment conference and describing it as "a glorious success," adding that "the conference sent a message to the whole world that the Palestinian Authority is able to build government institutions." Related coverage on the front page of Al-Ayyam reported that 2.5 million dollars in American assistance will be announced in Jenin on May 28 through USAID projects.

Ma'an News Agency reported that Fatah's Revolutionary Council (the party's political leadership body) is divided in opinion about the performance of the "caretaker" government of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. A formal evaluation of the current government is on the body's meeting agenda. Fayyad's critics, who believe that the government has not followed the Fatah party line, are expected to

demand changes in the ministerial cabinet. Others are said to support the current cabinet.

Ma'an News Agency reported that Baha Atiyya, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian Parliament, criticized comments by the Palestinian Ambassador to Egypt, Nabil Amr, against Hamas. Atiyya called on the Egyptian government to expel Amr, saying that he could not legitimately represent the Palestinian people. Atiyya called Amr's remarks "sectarian," saying that his words did not represent the voice of Palestinian resistance, but rather the narrow interests of the Fatah movement.

The dailies reported that former US President Jimmy Carter on May 25 urged European governments to break with US policy and lift the international boycott of Hamas and the blockade of the Gaza Strip. In an interview with the British daily The Guardian published on May 26, Carter also claimed that Israel has 150 nuclear weapons. Related coverage in all dailies quoted King Abdullah II saying in a meeting with a U.S. Congressional delegation that the region will remain in disorder until the Palestinian issue is solved.

The dailies and online news agencies reported that Israel halted the implementation of a plan to open 20 Palestinian police stations in the West Bank.

BLOCK QUOTES:

¶1. Under the headline, "Carter's Statements" (05/27), the daily editorial in the independent Al-Quds opined, "Former U.S. President

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Jimmy Carter will be remembered in history as the Godfather of the first Arab-Israeli peace process, for which he won a Nobel Peace Prize. In recent years, Carter has continued to issue statements that oppose Israeli stands - starting with his recent famous book, to his recent visit to the region, his meeting in Damascus with the leader of Hamas' political bureau Khaled Meshal, and Israel forbidding him from entering Gaza. Yesterday Carter said that the siege of Gaza is "one of the greatest human rights crimes now existing on Earth." Moreover, he declared that Israel possesses more than 150 nuclear weapons. Carter also said the United States had to begin holding direct talks with Iran about its nuclear program instead of starting a cycle of punishment and boycott. One only has to applaud Carter for his courage, and keep in mind that American presidents usually find out the facts after they finish their term in the office, once they have no desire to serve another term."

¶2. Independent daily Al-Ayyam carried an op-ed by veteran columnist Hani Al-Masri titled "Continuing with the Negotiations: the Worst or the Best of Two Evils?" (05/27): "... The failure of the Annapolis Conference caused a Palestinian and Arab depression and resulted in losing the bet they placed on a losing horse - that the Bush administration would actually try to be an objective power. Unfortunately, they are continuing to bet on yet another losing horse, i.e. the bet on the negotiation for a peace process, when it is becoming clear that it is a process devoid of any peace. As a matter of fact, the process is a big obstacle to peace because it gives the illusion that something is being done with the multiple political and economic conferences that have happened (Annapolis, Paris, Moscow, Berlin, and Bethlehem,) which undermines other initiatives and makes the peace process a process about negotiation only... Suspending the negotiations, if it happens, would not be a strategic step going back to armed resistance, but a strategic step towards negotiations. Suspending the negotiations would provoke international intervention, which would stop this process from going in an empty circular motion... After the many failures that the American administration has faced in the Middle East, it now needs a success, and it can't afford any more disappointment. It is important to keep the negotiations going, and [the American administration] would not seriously consider punishing the Palestinian leadership [for strategically suspending negotiations]... especially since the only alternative to the current [Palestinian] leadership is Hamas..."

